Letter from Taizé

June - July 2002 Bimonthly 0,50 Euro 3

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EASTER IN TAIZÉ

Mystery of Hope

How can we remain alert for the approach of the Resurrection? How can we prepare ourselves to welcome the spirit of the Risen Christ? Thousands of young people who came from over sixty countries to celebrate Easter in Taizé were able to have this experience through prayer and reflection on the Bible, times of listening and silence.

At the end of the Holy Saturday vigil, Brother Roger spoke of the brother who was going to make his life-commitment in the community during the celebration of the Resurrection on Sunday morning. "God can call us to give our entire lives for Christ and the Gospel, and there is happiness in the simple giving of oneself."

Then another brother spoke to link the experience of the week of prayer and sharing in Taizé with people's lives at home. "Today, being a witness to the Resurrection can mean looking for peace in places where the human family suffers from division. But this work of peace begins first of all in our own

Christ Jesus, even if our lips keep silent, our heart listens to you and also speaks to you. And you say to each one of us: surrender yourself in all simplicity to the Holy Spirit; for this, the little bit of faith you have is enough.

Prayer by Brother Roger of Taizé

hearts. Our hearts need inner peace. Our hearts are assailed by self-doubt, by discouragement, by indifference. The Risen Christ speaks to our hearts and says, 'Do not be afraid; I am here.' That inner peace does not make us passive. On the contrary, as for the disciples on Easter evening, peace enables us to go to the ends of the earth to communicate the mystery of hope entrusted to us by the Risen Christ."

It is in this spirit that the coming meeting in Paris will be held. This year, amidst so many questions about peace and trust in the world, families and Christian communities in the French capital will be eager to give a witness that encourages and renews hope.

Some Taizé brothers have already begun visits and meetings in Paris and the surrounding region. Others have been visiting different countries of Europe to meet those who will be organizing the local preparations for the meeting at the end of the year. What can help us to take part in a pilgrimage where the important thing is to be open for prayer and for meeting others, especially those who will offer us hospitality?

The Orthodox celebrated the Resurrection on May 5th, and several brothers were present in Romania and in Ukraine at that moment. They were able to take part in the joy of the Easter celebrations in those countries.

Preparing ourselves to "communicate a mystery of hope to those around us by the lives we live" (Letter 2002) will also be one of the themes of the summer and autumn meetings in Taizé. The groups will be better divided according to age, so that the sharing can be more relevant for each participant. New topics have been prepared: "Faith and hope," "How can I discover what God wants of me?" "Meeting God through the Psalms."

Already young people and groups from America, Asia and Africa have announced that they will be coming in the summer; they will tell how they participate in the pilgrimage of trust in very different contexts. And a meeting will take place in Brazil in early July, in the city of Campinas, near Sao Paolo.

28 December 02 - 1 January 03

Paris Taizé

www.taize.fr

MEETING IN PARIS AND THE SURROUNDING REGION
28 DECEMBER 2002 – 1 JANUARY 2003

The Challenge of Hospitality in Families

The European meeting will not take place until the end of December, and yet preparations are already well underway.

The news was made public at Easter on the hill of Taizé while Cardinal Lustiger, the archbishop of Paris, announced it on Palm Sunday during the yearly pilgrimage to Chartres, in which thousands of French students take part. The news seems to have been welcomed everywhere with great joy. Young Parisians passing through Taizé already feel a responsibility to offer the best welcome possible; they remember that the meaning of the meeting is among other things to discover that it can be just as beautiful to share our lives in Paris or anywhere else as in Taizé.

This 25th stage in the pilgrimage of trust, which began, incidentally, in Paris in 1978, will lead to the discovery of the Church in the eight departments of the Ile-de-France.

Returning to the capital open to all four winds, spending these five days of searching and hope together with a very cosmopolitan population, discovering that the beauty of Paris is not above all in its bridges or monuments, but in the heart of its inhabitants…offering hospitality in families certainly sums up best the challenge that the whole region will have to face.

Several of those in charge of youth ministry have understood this, and so they have decided to form small groups of young and not-so-young people to begin already to spread the news of the meeting and to explain what is at stake in their diocese. Some groups are already beginning to meet. Many are counting on the generosity of families to offer warm hospitality to participants. Some are even looking for solutions to shorten the travel time to the Porte of Versailles, where the prayers and most of the afternoon groups will be held, so that they can welcome people in their parish despite the distance. So for example in Vernon, located in the Eure, 75 km. from the capital, the young people in the student parish are trying to convince the town government to pay for a bus that will bring the participants back and forth to Paris each day.

A Great Diversity

The fact of asking different departments of the Ile-de-France to offer hospitality is a real challenge. Not just on account of transportation problems, but also because of the great diversity of the situations. This region around Paris, where almost ten million people live, in other words one-sixth of the population of France, sometimes gives you the impression that the whole world is gathered together in a hundred square kilometers. A third of the population of some towns is made up of foreigners. The Church has given many of them the possibility of meeting together while remaining faithful to their tradition and, at the same time, enabled them to forge links with other communities. In Seine St. Denis, the Church is above all the Portuguese, the Madagascan, the people from Guadalupe and Martinique, the Tamils, the Africans, the Italians, the Polish. It is not rare to attend Mass and to hear the homily in Portuguese!

The diversity is also economic. In just a few kilometers, you go from rich villas to housing developments hastily built in the sixties to accommodate the flood of immigrant workers brought to France to compensate for the lack of manual laborers. One of the priorities of the Christians of Yvelines is to create deep links also between these glaring inequalities. Emmanuel, a young seminarian, has great expectations for the meeting in this sense. "The young people of Versailles know that they are fortunate. Instead of being proud of this, or even

having a guilty conscience, they are looking more and more for ways of placing their material, human or spiritual wealth at the service of others. Concretely, that leads us to look for ways of building bridges between the incredibly diverse realities that make up the life of our diocese. The European meeting will be an extraordinary impetus to create those bridges, between Versailles and Mantes la Jolie, for example, and to discover, a bit like in Taizé, that leaving behind our prejudices leads us towards a bright and shining hope."

When you take the suburban trains, you understand well the Gospel's call to solidarity. "How can I share my hope with the illegal residents I visit each day at the prison of Villepinte, next to Charles de Gaulle airport?" Sister Anna asks herself. "How can we make this international meeting also a sign of deep solidarity with those who suffer, those who are mistreated?" In the parishes, each morning the participants will discover the reality of the neighborhoods presented by the parishioners: signs of hope, sometimes almost invisible, lost in the anonymity of the metropolis, which are nonetheless clear reflections of the Gospel. Like Aurélie and Delphine, who welcome street people each month for a meal indoors and a time of friendship. They had the idea of meeting once a week with those who wish to share a time of prayer in the parish of Saint Paul, in the Marais quarter of Paris. About twenty people come each week for the prayer—street people, young professionals, a few from Martinique... and a retired priest, who sees the prayer as a kind of icon that reveals the Kingdom of God.

Here are some of the questions for this meeting: How can we transform the anonymous appearance of this huge urban area? How can we begin the year 2003 together by showing all the signs of Christ's presence that are normally hidden in this large metropolis, all the seeds buried in the ground that bear fruit of peace and communion? How can we make communion wider and stronger, better than the current means of communication can do so?

At the end of this year, tens of thousands of young adults from all the countries of Europe and other parts of the world will be welcomed by families and local church communities in Paris and the surrounding region.

This new stage of the pilgrimage of trust on earth will be the 25th young adult European meeting prepared by Taizé and the fifth in Paris.

What will the Paris meeting be like?

- An experience of simple hospitality.
- Encountering the diversity, openness and inventiveness of local Christian communities.
- Taking time to seek God in prayer and silence, as well as in sharing with others.
- Experiencing different cultures and different Christian traditions.
- Celebrating Christ as the source of our community.
- Preparing ourselves to be people of hope and trust when we return home.

Some questions to help prepare for the Paris meeting:

- What can you undertake at home as a preparation for this meeting?
- What experiences can you share with those you will meet in Paris?
- What motivates you to set out towards other people who are far away?
- The pilgrimage to Paris calls for an inner attitude of openness and attentiveness to others. How can you begin by opening yourself to those who need you here and now?
- In the light of the Gospel, what are the most important challenges you see in life today?
- Do you know others who would be keen to join in this "pilgrimage of trust" and experience the Church in this way?.

Practical Details

Arrival: Saturday morning, 28th December 2002 between 7am and 12 noon.

Departure: Wednesday afternoon (after 4 pm), 1st January 2003

Accommodation: either with families or in school and church halls. It is essential to bring a camping mat and sleeping-bag.

General programme for 17-29 year olds: Participants will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the Paris region. There will be morning prayer each day in the neighbourhood where you are staying. Then meetings in small groups with other participants and with local people. Each day — midday and evening — there will be two common prayers in large halls for all participants of the meeting together. In the afternoon: workshops on various themes. There is also the possibility to spend the five days of the meeting in silence (separate accommodation).

Helpers/Choir (option open only to young adults between the ages of 17 and 29): Those who would like to help organise the meetings in the neighbourhoods, to be team-leaders for practical tasks or to be in the choir group, should arrive if possible on Thursday 26th December, between 8am and 3pm (arrival not possible on 27th December). Some places in these teams will also be open to participants who arrive on 28th December.

16 year olds may come to the meeting only if accompanied by an adult over 20, with each adult accompanying no more than six 16 year olds. Arrival: 28th December — not before.

Adults over 30: the meeting is intended for young adults under 30. However a few adults over this age can also come, in particular if they are leading a group of young people. We ask older adults (over 45) to consider sponsoring a young person to come from a church, chaplaincy or school in their area, instead of coming themselves. Adults over 30 all participate in the main group, arriving on 28th December (not before). If you cannot accept the same simple accommodation conditions as the young people and need a "real bed" please indicate this when you register.

Families with children, and people with a disability who need special accommodation should contact Taizé — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange this.

Your Contribution to costs is made on arrival. Young people from Ireland and Britain will be asked to contribute approx. 55 Euro for the whole meeting. (The exact amount will be known in November.) As well as the hire of meeting-halls and equipment, this covers all meals and a public transport pass. Adults leading groups of young people can contribute the same amount; other adults over 30 are asked to contribute the double.

Travel:

- From the UK: Special coaches will be arranged if there is sufficient demand. (Contact: "Skyliners", 02476 325682 / 328410; Freephone: 0500 481111; Fax: 02476 354626; email: taizebookings@skyliners.co.uk). Otherwise use existing rail, air or scheduled coach services to Paris.
- From other countries: Contact Taizé in the summer/autumn to learn of groups being arranged by air and by coach.

Register by 1st December. (See the form on the website or contact meetings@taize.fr)

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Taizé in Toronto

Taizé at World Youth Day
Toronto, 22-26 July 2002,
St. Paul's Basilica,
Queen Street East

As in previous years, Taizé brothers will take part in this year's World Youth Days held in Toronto, leading prayers with Taizé songs from Monday to Friday in St. Paul's Basilica. (For times and directions, see website www.taize.fr) Between these prayer times there will be opportunities to meet with the brothers and reflect on some of the themes of Brother Roger's new letter, *Love and Say It With Your Life*. A video presentation of Taizé will also be available.

THE RESURRECTION

Why do we speak of the resurrection of the body?

In all four gospels, the announcement of Jesus' resurrection is inseparable from the discovery of the empty tomb; his earthly body is no longer there. Similarly, the accounts of the appearances of the Risen Christ emphasize that he is not a ghost or a mere shadow (e.g. Luke 24:39-43; John 20:27; Acts 10:41). In our time with its scientific worldview, such affirmations can easily cause perplexity, or even skepticism.

The roots of the problem stem from the fact that, when we attempt to conceptualize the reality of the resurrection today, we spontaneously tend to imagine it a corpse coming back to life. Now in the gospel according to Saint John, there is an account of such an event—the story of Lazarus (John 11). Lazarus died and, in obedience to a command from Jesus, returned from death and took up his earthly life once again. This was indeed a great sign of the power of the Son of God over death, but it is fundamentally different from the proclamation of the resurrection. For the Jews of the time of Jesus, the resurrection was not a "miracle" in the life of an individual but a one-of-a-kind event, which marked the end of the present world and the beginning of a new age; it inaugurated a universe transfigured according to the will of God. It was, therefore, a collective event: all people, or at least all the righteous, would awaken from death to take part in this new existence. For the New Testament, then, Jesus is "the firstborn from among the dead" (Col 1:18); his resurrection makes him "the firstborn of many brothers and sisters" (Rom 8:29).

For the Jewish mentality, the entry into this new age is unthinkable without a body. The body is basically a human being insofar as he or she is able to enter into relationship with others. By means of my body, I am present to the world and to other people. And since the world to come is essentially a world of communion, human beings cannot participate in it without a body. It could even be said that the world of the resurrection is first and foremost a bodily one; Saint Paul sometimes refers to ultimate reality as "the Body of Christ" (cf. Col 2:7; Eph 1:22-23).

This being said, we should not imagine the resurrection body as identical to our bodies of flesh here on this earth. In chapter 15 of his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul asks the question, "How do the dead rise? With what kind of body do they return?" (1 Cor 15:35). He considers it sufficient to reply by the image of the seed that becomes a plant, and by reminding his readers that many different kinds of bodies are already found in our present universe. He concludes that our earthly bodies will be transfigured: "just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly, so shall we bear the likeness of the heavenly," because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:49-50). He goes on to speak of a "spiritual body," in other words, a body totally transformed by the Breath of God that turns it into a pure reality of communion. Some aspects of the appearances of the Risen Christ recounted in the gospels give us a glimpse of this—a humanity that loses all its limitations to act in total freedom and where there are no barriers to encountering others. In any case, we should not forget that the world of the resurrection remains utterly beyond all of our categories on this side of death. We are promised "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, what has never entered the human mind—all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9).

Why is it so hard for the disciples to recognize the Risen Christ?

It is true that in the accounts of the appearances of the Risen Christ to his disciples, the gospel-writers, particularly Luke and John, accord a great deal of importance to the question of his recognition. The disciples going to Emmaus are "kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16) and Mary mistakes him for a gardener (John 20:15). On other occasions, he has to show his wounds in order to be recognized (Luke 24:40; John 20:20,27). And on the lakeshore, where at first the disciples do not recognize him (John 21:4), John has these curious words: "None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord" (John 21:12).

In the mystery of the resurrection, we are confronted by the absolute Newness of God. No image, no category of our world allow us to make sense of this Life beyond death. No preparation on this side of death, which remains a radical break, can enable us to take the step that would let us cross over to the other side. The only bridge that can pass over the abyss must come from the other side, in other words from the Risen Christ himself. It is Christ who has to "make himself known" and, in addition, he is the only one who has the ability to do this. As opposed to a body of flesh, which does not determine its own ability to be recognized, the spiritual body, a pure energy of communion, has the power to give others the possibility of entering into a personal relationship with him.

But although the initiative comes from the Risen Christ, the disciples for their part must allow themselves to be touched by the Newness of God. When confronted by this great mystery, it is still possible to doubt (Matt 28:17). What makes recognition more difficult, in any case, is a stubborn clinging to what we have already experienced or understood in the past. Mary of Magdala is so traumatized by the death of the one she loved, and so obsessed by the need to find his body in order to hold on to the vestiges of a vanished relationship, that she does not even see that he is standing in front of her alive! It is only when Jesus calls her by name, touching the most intimate and personal part of her being, that something clicks and she finds herself suddenly in the present (John 20:11-16).

Recognizing the Risen Christ, far from being just an insignificant detail, thus lies at the very heart of the Easter mystery. It expresses the *metanoia*, the radical reversal or change in our way of looking that turns us into believers. This change sometimes requires a long preparation, as for the disciples on the road to Emmaus. And it does not remove the difficulties and the sufferings of our personal and collective existence; it is significant that the continuity between the crucifixion and the resurrection is expressed by the marks of suffering on the body of Jesus. Recognizing the Risen Christ means all at once seeing, in the midst of the pain and the dead ends of our world, a Love able to give meaning to our lives, a road that opens towards the fullness of God. It means being astounded by the discovery that, where earlier we had seen only sadness and despair, in fact a new birth was already in process: "He was there all the time, and I didn't realize it!"

Dt 4:29-31

1 Mon You will seek the Lord your God; you will find the Lord if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul.

1 P 1:22-25

2 Tue Peter writes: Love one another deeply, from the heart.

Jn 20:24-29

3 Wed St THOMAS
Jesus said to Thomas: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

1 Co 4:1-5

4 Thu Paul writes: Judge nothing prematurely, but wait until the Lord comes.

Ps 18

5 Fri God brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he loves me.

Rm 8:31-39

6 Sat St. Paul writes: I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Mt 11:25-27

7 SUN Jesus said: I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for having revealed to little children what you have hidden from the learned and clever.

Jr 3:12

8 Mon The Lord says to his people: Return to me, for I am merciful.

Lk 9:57-62

9 Tue Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Ga 5:16-26

10 Wed Since the Spirit is our life, let our actions be guided by the Spirit.

Ex 22:20-21

11 Thu The Lord says to his people: Do not mistreat or oppress the strangers in your midst, for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Ph 3:4-14

12 Fri Paul writes: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the communion in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Dt 31:1-8

13 Sat The Lord your God walks with you. God will never leave you or forsake you.

Mt 13:1-23

14 SUN Jesus said to his disciples: Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear!

Lk 6:20-23

15 Mon Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

Ps 139

16 Tue Fathom me, God, and know my heart. Probe me, know my thoughts and guide me in the way that is everlasting.

Mt 11:28-30

17 Wed Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

Jn 6:41-51

18 Thu Jesus said: No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

Mt 5:13-16

19 Fri Jesus said to his disciples: You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again?

Si 2:1-9

20 Sat You who revere the Lord, wait for his mercy. Do not turn aside from him.

Mt 13:31-32

21 SUN Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which someone took and sowed in their field. Of all seeds it is the smallest, yet once it has grown it is the biggest of plants.

Ps 27

22 Mon "Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Lk 6:27-38

23 Tue Jesus said: Give, and it will be given to you. A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure used for you.

Ep 5:14-20

24 Wed Let yourselves be filled by the Spirit. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

Mt 20:20-28

25 Thu St JAMES
Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world the powerful make their power felt. Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.

1 P 5:5-7

26 Fri Clothe yourselves in humility in your relationships with others, for God gives his grace to the humble.

Jn 14:19-23

27 Sat Jesus said: Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and the Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make our home in them.

Mt 13:44-46

28 SUN Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; they hide it again, and in their joy sell everything they have and buy that field.

Ps 69:30-37

29 Mon You who seek God, may your hearts live! For God listens to the poor.

Mt 6:1-6

30 Tue Jesus said: When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your generosity is secret. And your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.

Ps 37

31 Wed Make the Lord your joy: God will give you even more than your heart's desire.

God of compassion, disconcerted by the incomprehensible suffering of the innocent, we pray for those who are undergoing trials. Inspire the hearts of those who are seeking peace, so indispensable for all the peoples of the earth.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JULY

Holy Spirit, for all of us you have a call, so enable us to search in order to discover what you want from each one of us.

Mt 11:25-30
1 Thu Jesus said: Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Mi 7:7-8
2 Fri I watch in hope for God who will save me. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light.

Mk 10:35-45
3 Sat Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to save many.

Mt 14:13-21
4 SUN Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, who gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.

Dt 4:29-31
5 Mon The Lord your God is a merciful God who will not forsake you.

Mt 17:1-8
6 Tue TRANSFIGURATION On the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, a bright cloud covered the disciples and a voice said: This is my beloved Son, on whom my favour rests; listen to him.

Lv 19:33-34
7 Wed God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

Rm 14:13-19
8 Thu St. Paul writes: Let us stop judging one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any obstacle in the way of another.

Ps 42
9 Fri In the day, God sends his faithful love, and even at night the song it inspires in me is a prayer to the God of my life.

Hos 6:3-4,6
10 Sat The Lord says: I desire faithful love, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

Mt 14:22-33
11 SUN Jesus came towards his disciples, walking on the water, and they were terrified; but at once he said to them: Courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.

Jr 29:11-14
12 Mon The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans not for disaster but for peace, to give you a future and a hope.

Hos 14:2-9
13 Tue The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart. I hear them and watch over them.

Mk 3:31-35
14 Wed Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.

Lk 1:39-45
15 Thu THE VIRGIN MARY Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

1 Jn 4:16-19
16 Fri There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

1 Co 1:26-31
17 Sat God chose things that by human standards are weak to confound the strong. God chose what is lowly and despised in the eyes of the world.

Rm 11:29,33-36
18 SUN Paul writes: God never revokes his gifts or his call.

Ps 9
19 Mon Those who know your name trust in you, Lord. For you never forsake those who seek you.

1 Jn 1:1-7
20 Tue God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, we are in communion with one another.

Jn 10:11-15
21 Wed Jesus said: I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Mt 5:44-48
22 Thu Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. You must set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his.

Ws 1:11-15
23 Fri God did not make death and takes no pleasure in the destruction of the living. God created all things for life.

Lk 17:20-21
24 Sat Jesus said: The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, for the kingdom of God is among you.

Mt 16:13-20
25 SUN Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by my Father in heaven."

Jn 8:12
26 Mon Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life.

1 Th 3:12-13
27 Tue May God make your love increase so that it overflows for each other and for everyone. May God confirm your hearts.

Ezk 11:17-20
28 Wed The Lord says: I will give an undivided heart to my people. I will put a new spirit in them.

Ps 62
29 Thu Rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my hope.

Lk 1:39-56
30 Fri Mary said: The Lord's merciful love stretches from age to age upon those who revere him.

Jn 20:19-23
31 Sat The Risen Christ said to the disciples: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

AUGUST

JOHANNINE HOURS

July: Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus is faced with a big failure: he has been rejected in the cities where he began to announce God's Reign, and he expresses his suffering with harsh words (vv. 20-24).

But then he returns to what has inspired him from the beginning of his public life, those words that God said to him, "You are my beloved Son, whom it pleased me to choose" (Matt 3:17). Now there is no voice from heaven, as there was at his baptism, but only a simple reminder in prayer of God's words. And in this difficult situation, the words he heard at the beginning grow deeper in him, expressing the mystery of his entire being. Jesus does not receive any greater clarity about the future, but the situation is illuminated "vertically," so to speak.

Jesus can continue to announce God's presence, not like "the wise and the learned" but like someone who is "lowly and humble of heart," without imposing anything. And already his disciples are associated with him in proclaiming the Kingdom of God in this disarming way. And so praise springs up, for in spite of the failure his mystery is communicated, "revealed" to human beings.

The task that Christ gives us, in other words the commandment to love God and our neighbor, is not an additional burden. To "learn from him" means hearing in our consciences, in our turn, that we are loved by God for ever. In this way we enter into the same relationship that Jesus has with the Father. That is his "yoke," without which our earth cannot be ploughed up nor bear fruit.

- Are there words in the Bible that help me to go forward even in difficult situations?
- Where do I see the Church reflecting particularly well the image of God who is kindness and who does not impose himself?
- What difficult events have led me to deepen my image of God?

August: Luke 24:13-35

This story tells us how two men leave behind failure, anger and sadness, and how they discover the source of peace, joy and communion that nothing can destroy. This source is a person; to draw from it, to encounter it, we have to turn away from what obstructs the eyes of our soul.

We discover the two disciples as they are returning to their village defeated, leaving their companions behind. Caught up in their misfortunes, they do not recognize the one who joins them on the road. At the end of the story, forgetting their weariness, their doubts and the dangers that threaten them, they run back to Jerusalem because they have something very important to tell those they had left. They are able to live for others once again.

The Risen Christ comes to join the disciples where they are, entering into their rhythms, listening to their complaints and their incomprehension. He does not reproach them for running away and repudiating him. Nothing about his appearance is striking. All he does is repeat the gestures he performed so many times when he was with them and say the words he said so often. But since he has lived to the end what these words were announcing, now they take on a whole new authority. The Scriptures which previously were pointing towards the future have now come to fulfillment. The sharing of bread, which anticipated the gift of self, now expresses the fact that Jesus' entire being has become an offering.

What happened during those days in Jerusalem was not an accident. It was announced and prepared ahead of time, and that becomes a strong support to discern God's hope and to struggle to make it a reality. By giving his life to the end, Jesus opens a way so that, in our turn, we can give ourselves each day and so be creators of communion.

- In what circumstances have I discovered that I needed a source of forgiveness and peace?
- Have I already had to remain alongside someone who was going through a difficult time? What helped me in this?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Jerusalem

May God Guide Us to a Better Time

This letter from a rabbi in Jerusalem arrived in Taizé on Easter Day:

I write to you now, at this time of holiness for both our faiths—*Pessah*/Passover and Easter—with wishes of joy and peace for you and your wonderful community. It is especially at this holiday season that our traditions intersect in so many ways and there is so much that we could discuss and learn together.

While I look forward to the time at which I can return to Taizé to do just that, I want to share with you and the brothers just a bit of how my time with you and the lessons of love and pluralism that I learned at Taizé continue to influence my own spiritual practice.

I often relate to others—guests at our Sabbath table, school children, rabbinical students and colleagues—my impressions of that short stay with you in September, describing to them the intensity of prayer, the commitment of the community members to a higher ideal, the beautiful music and the communal effort. I tell them how Christians from all over the world come to Taizé to recharge their batteries and how each individual is accepted without judgement. I tell them that we, as Jews, have so much to learn about how the different ideological streams of Judaism could not only better survive together, but actually thrive together, if we were to observe how it has been done by you and the community in France.

My wife and daughters (all five of them!) are by now familiar with four or five different melodies from Taizé which we use at various times in our worship at home, with different words, I have to admit, or very often without words. By the way, everyone's favorite is *Bendigo al Señor.* And it was just the other night, as our family and guests gathered in our home for the Seder on the first night of Pessah, that we began the observance with *Tu sei sorgente viva...vieni Spirito Santo,* hoping that indeed our table would be blessed with the presence of the Shechinah, amidst the violence and sorrow that both we Israelis and our Palestinian neighbors continue to suffer.

It is 22:00 Saturday night and the radio has just reported yet another suicide bomber, this time in Tel Aviv. Earlier this evening we learned that our upstairs neighbor had been killed in the attack on Wednesday night in Netanya, where a suicide bomber killed over twenty persons who were celebrating the Seder at a hotel. Two of my students were called up yesterday for emergency reserve service in the army. Arafat's residence is surrounded by tanks and once again last night I heard the explosions in nearby Beit Jalla.

The lessons of love and pluralism that I learned at Taizé would seem to many Israelis as irrelevant and detached from reality. Yet for me, it is those experiences and memories that comfort me and provide me with hope for a better future. May God hear the prayers from all over the world—from Jerusalem to Taizé, from North Ontario to Los Angeles, from Budapest to Nottingham, in all languages and all traditions—and guide us in ushering a better time, a time of salvation for all humankind.

With blessings from Jerusalem,
Rabbi David

Austria

With Simple Means

A young mother tells of her presence in the midst of the rejected:

I would like to share with you my day-to-day commitment in a parish in Vienna. Since last autumn, I have been spending three half-days a week in the center for homeless mothers run by Caritas. The woman in charge of this center is also one of the organizers of the Mass for the homeless held on Sunday morning at the center and for one held for seriously handicapped children on Sunday evening. With the priest who is chaplain and a few colleagues, she takes care of these mothers and children with a heart right out of the Gospel. For me, to be with them is like going back to school to relearn the basics of life from the beginning.

Two mornings a week, I take care of the children while their mothers meet with the social worker. Often with those children I rediscover the joys I find with my own son, along with the exhaustion and overwork. Everything I learned from my son and continue to learn from him is like a treasure for me that I can share with other children. Some children are so active, with so much energy, that at times I have the impression that I have to become a circus trainer. And at the same time, those children take me by the hand and in their own way teach me the Gospel. Often in the parish or during the prayers organized using the songs of Taizé, I am the one who knows where to go and who is in control of things. Now I am the one who learns, who receives, and I am really full of joy because of this adventure which invites me to make new discoveries.

One afternoon a week we meet together—mothers, children, and volunteers—to drink coffee, play and have fun. The priest first meets with the mothers who want to talk with him about the past week. Then he takes his guitar and for an hour we celebrate anniversaries and birthdays in the small chapel (which is also used on occasion as a playroom and a sleeping-room!). With simple means, but which come from the heart, we celebrate together. Everyone receives something; everyone hears their name in the prayer. Even if it doesn't make their future any easier, you can imagine how these moments give life and light to these mothers and children who have had so many bad experiences. And I never cease to be astonished: cannot I, too, draw a lot of profit from this experience in order to create a family that can love, build, comfort and strengthen?

After having discovered such places of suffering, who could go back to their daily life without having these words of Christ in the Gospel inscribed on their hearts for ever: "Whatever you do for one of these little ones, you do for me"?

More and more I try to have contact with the mothers. I used to be afraid that I would have to take on their problems. Now, I am discovering all we have in common, all the beautiful things that we can share in spite of everything, through our weaknesses and our mistakes. Understanding one another perhaps means being open to one another in the trust that God offers us, without prejudice or calculation. When that works, it is like bread that is shared—an incredible source of energy, an impetus that bears us onward. We can give one another mutual encouragement with almost nothing. And during these meetings, the heavy solitude that weighs upon many, young and old, vanishes all by itself. I would have never imagined that I could learn to build real relationships in such a place!

What means most to me is the sharing of the Gospel that takes place Sunday evenings, after all the confusion of the day. We spend a good time in silence reading the Gospel of the day. Then each person shares simply in what way God has touched them. For me it is a great help to be able to journey with people who have the same points of reference as I do, without long discussions, but with the demanding challenge to orient the coming week in the light of our ongoing life.

Bangladesh

A Small Step on the Way to Trust

For almost thirty years, brothers of the community have been living in Bangladesh, sharing the existence of the poorest there. One of them writes:

We have been living among Muslims for many years. Among the 130 million people of this country, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians are small minorities. Only half a million Christians live here. Sadly, they are divided into some 50 different churches and groups with a large variety of denominational colours. The Buddhists live in the South of the country. They may be as numerous as the Christians. The Hindus live throughout the country and may account for 10% of the population.

Among the Muslims, we have seen for a number of years a revival of faith. Each year, more and more women and girls wear the *burqah*, a dress that covers even their faces. The beautiful coloured saris are considered un-Islamic. The yearly fast of Ramadan is observed more strictly than before.

We have always tried to show a great respect for Islam. Almost all the children in our six schools are Muslim. The handicapped people we serve through our «Centre for the Handicapped» are also almost all Muslims. The mothers with their mentally handicapped children who come to our home once a month, and the women and children who come every morning for medical help are also Muslim.

Through the years of our presence here, a trust has grown up. We have always tried to work together: Muslims, Hindus Buddhists and Christians. A deep respect for one another and a heart that searches for what unites us make it possible—together—to welcome and to serve the poor and the forgotten, without our respective religions in any way hindering this service of love to others.

This year, urged on by the happenings in New York and Afghanistan, we added another small step on this road of trust and understanding. During Ramadan, we shared in the fast: some of us every day, others at our home each Friday. Instead of the noon meal, we spent time in the chapel, praying for peace and harmony. The money we saved by not having the noon meal was given to a poor Muslim neighbour. At the end of the day, we invited our neighbours for the Iftar, the traditional breaking of the fast of the day by eating together a handful of *muri*, puffed rice, and some fruit.

Letter from Taizé

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